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Death disarmed of its sting.

A

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY

OF THE

HON. ROGER MINOTT SHERMAN,

BEING THE

DISCOURSE PREACHED AT HIS FUNERAL,

January 2, 1845.

BY

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DISCOURSE.

1 CORINTHIANS, XV, 55.—O death! where is thy sting? O grave!
where is thy victory?

THIS triumphant ejaculation, which Christ hath made the property of all dying believers, implies that death may lose its sting and the grave its victory. And whence comes this change in the issue of the conflict which man is ever waging with death, and in which death is the natural conqueror? How shall we account for this transmutation so strange, so wondrous, so heavenly, by which this most resistless, relentless, unsparing conqueror, is itself made to die, is swallowed up in victory, and at the very moment of seeming to crush its victim, translates him to an endless life, gilds him with fadeless glory, transports him with the fullness of joy evermore, and crowns him with an immortal diadem?

Our answer is found in that record which God hath given of his Son, who hath brought life and immortality to light. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," who has made the sublime annunciation on which all human hope depends. "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; WHOSO BELIEVETH ON ME, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE."

Since then, death, through the wondrous work of Christ, may be disarmed of its sting, and the grave robbed of its victory, let us for a few moments consider more precisely

in what way, to what extent, and with respect to what persons, this comes to pass.

1. In the verse following our text, the Apostle declares, "the sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." Hence it is something wholly distinct from the mere physical pangs of expiring nature, or the instinctive dread and abhorrence of its own dissolution which it ever cherishes. This dread of self-annihilation is a property of life itself, which is in its very nature a ceaseless effort to be, and to avoid non-existence. Irrespective of sin or holiness, penalty or rewards, whether the death of the body be, or be not regarded as the only and certain passage to a perfect and blissful state of existence, it is in itself what we instinctively dread and shun. Like pain, we avoid it if possible. We never choose it as in the least desirable for its own sake; although we may cheerfully submit to it as we submit to bitter drugs and burning caustic, because without it, we cannot escape the pains of earth, or reach the bliss of heaven. In this light the Christian may desire death, because to die is gain, and he desires to depart and be with Christ which is far better: but not because it is in itself lovely, or otherwise than grim, ghastly and terrific. This natural aversion to the physical pangs of death, therefore, is not its sting, since it is a part of our sentient nature, and still cleaves to Christians as to others.

But *the sting of death is sin*, i. e. the violation of the law of God and consequent subjection to its tremendous penalties. Thus "the law is the strength of sin," so far forth as it is a sting. Now death is the penalty of sin, its wages, "it passed upon all men for that all have sinned;" even death temporal and death eternal, the death of the body and the death of the soul. And unless its nature and power as a penalty be annulled by faith in him who con-

quered it, the sting of death lies in this, that it is not merely a *natural* but a *penal* evil, not the mere dissolution of the body, but the entrance of the soul upon the merited woes of the second death ; not the mere end of life, but a transfer to the pains of eternal retribution. It is the law, the violated, threatening, immutable law, that invests sin with this fearful power. Viewed in this light, the only light possible out of Christ, death indeed has its sting, which no tongue can tell or mind conceive.

We see then how this sting is removed by Christ. He took it upon himself. Sin is its cause. He bore our sins, was made under the law, became a curse, suffered and died, the just for the unjust. He thus discharges the demands of the law against the believing. What then if the wages of sin is death ; is not "the gift of God eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ?" What though death in its original nature, be the first, stinging, insupportable stroke of God's wrath revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness? We are delivered from the body, the substance, the sting of this death, thanks be to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. "His blood cleanseth from all sin." Whoso believeth on him "shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life," for he is "not under law but under grace."

2. Let us consider briefly the extent of this deliverance. It is perfect. It is co-extensive with sin and all its dismal fruits ; if sin abounds, grace doth much more abound. The destruction of sin, involves the removal of all its direful effects, the whole ghastly retinue which it brings with it. Christ the second Adam restores us to the primeval perfection, glory and bliss, which we lost by the apostacy of the first Adam. The parts of this restoration are successive and gradual, so that it is not wholly consummated, till

the body is raised and glorified at the last day. But it is wholly and forever secured by the first act of true faith. For we are "justified by faith." And whom God justifies, them he also glorifies, and none shall be able to separate them from his love or pluck them out of his hands. With respect to the condemning or penal power of sin, deliverance is perfect at the moment of our union to Christ by faith, and ever afterward: for there is "no more condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Whatever sorrows, sufferings or calamities visit the believer, they are not a part of the curse and penalty of the law. They are chastisements sent in fatherly love and faithfulness, and not in vengeance; not willingly, but for our profit; for the very purpose of promoting our deliverance from sin. As to sin itself, at the new birth, it receives a mortal blow, by being subjected to a reigning principle of holiness, which is then born into life, and is ever waxing stronger and stronger until death, when it extirpates the last remnant of sin, and the spirits of the just are made perfect in holiness. Although ever dying, sin is never perfectly extinct in this life; it is the heaviest burthen under which the believer groans in this tabernacle; its end is the sweetest part of the deliverance which death brings with itself. With respect to the body, it is not freed from the pains and infirmities in this life, which belong to its frail and perishing nature. Nor does it escape death. It is not renovated and glorified till the last day, when the archangel's trump shall wake from the grave its slumbering tenantry, the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed; "our vile bodies fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself." But at death it sleeps in Jesus. Its pains are forever ended. The disembodied spirit is already glorified

with Christ in Paradise, awaiting its reunion to the glorified body. Thus death has lost its whole sting: nay, it is the birth-throe of an endless, glorious and blissful life. There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, undisturbed by the slightest annoying sensation. They shall hunger no more and thirst no more, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, their works do follow them."

3. And who receive this stupendous deliverance? To whom rightly belongs this strangely rapturous outburst, which sheds a halo of glory even over sepulchral darkness? I answer to those who die in the Lord; i. e. to those who are joined to Christ by a living union. This union is constituted by faith, which lays hold of and rests upon Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel, and gives us an interest and participation in all the benefits of his salvation. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life"—he shall not perish or come into condemnation. The just are saved by faith through grace—they walk by faith—they live by faith, and overcome and triumph by faith. Without this faith it is impossible to please God. Unbelief is a rejection of Christ; he that believeth not is condemned already.

But since there are divers sorts of faith on which men rely for an interest in this inestimable boon, we must distinguish that which is dead and spurious, from that which is living and genuine. Omitting much that might be said on this topic, I will only observe that true and saving faith shows itself in correspondent works, in a life of holy, conscientious obedience to all the requirements of God. Without such works, faith is declared by the Apostle to be dead.

Ye are my friends, says Christ, if ye do whatsoever I command you. And any other faith than that which leads us to walk in all the commands and ordinances of the Lord blameless, gives no warrant for the triumphant exclamation, "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!" But he that truly believeth, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and in his dying moments may with truth adopt the words of Simeon: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

The full and well-founded conviction that death has lost its sting and the grave its victory, with respect to our deceased, beloved and revered friend, whose breathless body now lies before us, chiefly assuages the grief produced by this melancholy dispensation of divine Providence. It has diffused a sensation of gloom, as wide-spread as his honorable fame. But we sorrow not as those without hope. He ended a consistent and exemplary Christian life, with a serene and peaceful death. After a life in which his piety had been known by its fruits, and when the signs of death were stealing upon him with an unexpected and surprising rapidity, he assured me that in the prospect of a speedy dissolution, he felt supported by the consolations of that gospel he had long professed, and that he rested calmly on that Savior, who had ever been, and now seemed peculiarly, his only hope. And when the dying hour came, he seemed free not only from the mental sting, but the physical agonies of death. There was not a pang, not a struggle, not even a motion of a muscle, beyond the mere gasp of expiring nature. So wholly had death lost its sting. It was good to be there notwithstanding the gloom: to see the venerable servant of God calmly and placidly falling asleep in Jesus, "quite on the verge of

heaven." "Mark the perfect man, behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

It is due to the occasion, to present such a sketch of his life and character as the time will permit.

The Hon. Roger Minott Sherman was born at Woburn, Mass., May 22, 1773, and was the youngest of six children of Rev. Josiah Sherman, then the Congregational minister of that place. His father was in the fourth line of descent from Captain John Sherman, who emigrated from Dedham, in England, to Watertown, Mass., about the year 1635. He was brother to the Hon. Roger Sherman, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and raised himself from a humble condition to a celebrity for statesmanship, that brightens with the lapse of time. The mother of Judge Sherman was Martha, daughter of the Hon. James Minott, of Concord, Mass., one of the distinguished men of his time, and in the fourth line of descent from George Minott, who was born in England, was one of the first settlers of Dorchester, Mass., and a ruling elder in the church in that place thirty years. Owing to the disturbances produced by the Revolution, Judge Sherman's father removed in 1775 to Milford, in this state, and was for some time pastor of the second church in that town. He thence removed to Goshen in this state, and was pastor of the church in that place several years. He finally removed to Woodbridge, near New Haven, where he preached the remainder of his life, and now lies buried. Of his children, the four oldest were daughters, the two youngest sons. They are all now dead, Judge Sherman having been the last survivor.

In 1789, at the age of sixteen, Mr. Sherman entered the Sophomore class in Yale College. Six weeks afterwards his father died, leaving no property, since his in-

come, like that of most ministers, had been barely equal to his current expenses. He was thus deprived of the means on which he had relied for defraying his college expenses. But by the kindness of his uncle,* who received him into his family and rendered him other important aid, together with his own exertions, he was enabled to go through the academic course. He kept a school in New Haven during a considerable portion of his two last college years, and at the same time attended regularly all the exercises of his class, and graduated with a high standing. He then took an academy in Windsor, and commenced the study of law under the Hon. Oliver Ellsworth. He afterwards took a common school in Litchfield, and continued the study of law under the Hon. Tapping Reeve. In March, 1795, he was appointed a tutor in Yale College, and instructed the class that graduated in 1797, at the same time pursuing his professional studies under the Hon. Simeon Baldwin, who still outlives his pupil, and is here to attend his burial. In his own class in college were several distinguished men. The class which he instructed also numbers several eminent names. In the office of tutor he was peculiarly successful. Instead of relying on official authority or magisterial airs to gain an ascendancy over his pupils, he rather won their respect and esteem by the ability and faithfulness of his instructions, the benignity of his manners, and the justness of his discipline. His extraordinary power of disentangling the intricate, mastering the profound, and making the obscure plain, combined with a rare faculty of expression, must have rendered him a most able and brilliant instructor.

After holding this office somewhat more than a year, he resigned it, and in May, 1796, was admitted to the bar in

* Hon. Roger Sherman.

New Haven. He then established himself as a practicing lawyer at Norwalk. On Dec. 13, of the same year, he was married to Miss Elizabeth Gould, daughter of Dr. Wm. Gould, then of New Haven, previously of Branford, sister of the late Judge Gould of Litchfield, who after a happy conjugal union of forty eight years, near half a century, is still spared to mourn his loss. They had but two children, twin sons of high promise; but by an inscrutable Providence they were cut down, and as we trust, are sleeping in Jesus. In 1807 he removed to this place, where he has since resided for a term of near forty years; and has become so identified with all our social and public interests, that there is no sphere in which his loss will not be deeply and intensely felt.

Mr. Sherman had not long pursued the practice of law, before his powerful intellect and untiring industry raised him to that high eminence in his profession, of which he had already given promise. He realized the most sanguine anticipations of his friends. As a jurist he had few equals, and scarcely a superior in the country. While he most excelled in handling abstruse, mazy questions of law, he maintained the very first rank in whatever belongs to his profession. His legal knowledge, his logical skill, his high persuasive powers, his commanding eloquence, his unwearied industry, his faithfulness to his clients, gave him the highest success and celebrity in every department of legal practice, attracted to him an overflowing business in this and other counties of the state, and often led to a demand for his services in great cases in other states. Seldom does the bar suffer the loss of so distinguished an ornament.

From 1814 to 1818 Mr. Sherman was a member of the upper branch of our state legislature, in which he distin-

guished himself by his thorough knowledge of the laws, policy and institutions of the state, his mastery of all subjects under discussion, his high power in debate, his assiduous attention to business, his patriotic devotion to the welfare of the people. Though among the younger members, he rose rapidly to an ascendant influence.

In 1814, he was chosen by the legislature of this state a delegate to the convention of the New England states, assembled at Hartford, for the purpose of devising measures suited to the exigency into which they were brought by the war. This is not the time nor the place to discuss the merits of that convention. This however is undeniable, that New England sent to it her choicest, most gifted, trusted, and honored statesmen; and that whatever impartial history may say of the wisdom of the movement, it will pronounce their intentions pure and patriotic. It is proof of the estimation in which Mr. Sherman was already held, that he was selected to bear responsibilities which New England would confide to none but her most tried and able men. In this galaxy of eminent statesmen he shone as elsewhere with his own peculiar lustre. Of the nature, objects, and doings of the convention, he has given a detailed account as a witness in court, under the responsibilities of an oath, which has been published to the world.

From 1818 to 1839 he was almost wholly devoted to his profession, and held no public office, except that he was occasionally a representative of his own town in the legislature. He was not however without interest in, or influence upon, the legislation of the state. He originated and drafted many important laws, which have become inwrought into her fixed policy. Most of these have reference to the administration of justice; tend to abridge

the cost and delay involved in vindicating our rights at law ; and to abolish cumbrous formalities, which defeat or embarrass the attainment of justice.

In 1839, he was chosen Judge of the Superior Court, and Associate Judge of the Supreme Court for the revision of errors in this state. This station he was preëminently fitted to adorn. He brought to it rare legal learning, logical acumen, expertness in the practice of law, unbending integrity, untiring industry, a commanding person, a dignified and courteous address. I need not say that he filled the office with honor to himself and advantage to the state. His written opinions in the Court of Errors, published in the thirteenth and fourteenth volumes of the Connecticut Reports, will speak for themselves ; and, alas ! are the most important monuments of his great intellect which he has left to posterity. In May, 1842, he resigned this office, on account of ill health. Since that period, he has passed his time chiefly in domestic retirement, as increasing infirmities have increased his need of those genial supports and solaces which can only be found in the bosom of home. While his body has been gradually giving way, his intellect has wonderfully retained its pristine clearness, vigor and elasticity. It has scarcely been affected by the decays of age. To the last, so far as he had the power of articulation, his mind appeared to seize all subjects that came before it, with its wonted grasp. After a short illness, which reduced him more rapidly than the worst fears of his friends, he died, Dec. 30, 1844, at the age of seventy one years and seven months.

I will now attempt a brief delineation of his character.

His intellect, as has been already implied, was naturally of extraordinary power, invigorated by thorough discipline, sharpened by constant exercise, well stored by laborious

research, and polished to a classical finish by the study of the finest models. To these high inward endowments, he added a noble person, a voice of uncommon compass, clearness and melody, a free and graceful elocution. Hence he was not only a powerful reasoner, but a powerful orator. His mind was clear, capacious, discriminating, comprehensive. Nor was it fitful in its vigor, now breaking forth in meteoric brilliancy, and then sinking into dullness and indolence; but it had an iron patience and perseverance, and was ever active, ever buoyant. This trait it possessed in a most extraordinary degree. It never seemed to flag or shrink from exertion, or lose its elastic vigor under any degree of bodily exhaustion or pain. There was no web of sophistry, no covert flaw or labyrinthine maze in an opponent's argument, which it would not readily detect and expose. And in constructing a positive argument, his method was logical and direct. Starting with some principle or fact which none could dispute, he would evolve from it link after link, till the conclusion which he sought to establish, before it was looked for, seemed fastened as by an adamant chain. Above all, his mind loved clearness, and abhorred all obscurity and mist. He delighted to make things plain himself, and was impatient of all transcendental and dreamy speculations in others. He had great confidence in the power of truth and argument, and that what he felt to be true himself, he could make appear so to others. This gave an ardor and enthusiasm to his pleas, which was one great cause of his success. Nor were his studies and attainments exclusively professional. He was largely furnished with liberal knowledge. He was well versed in theology and metaphysics, and peculiarly fond of the exact and natural sciences. He was familiar with the science of government and political economy, and whatever

it most concerns a statesman to know. Nor did he neglect elegant literature. This various knowledge he made tributary to his profession, in cases that could be illustrated by it, and sometimes astonished and delighted his auditors, as he poured forth its treasures.

But our venerable friend and brother was not only a great, he was also a good man : good, not merely according to the standard of worldly and fashionable virtue, but according to the Christian and evangelical code. His extraordinary gifts and endowments, the great fame and influence which they won for him, were strictly subordinated to moral and religious principle. "What things were gain to him, those he counted loss for Christ : yea, doubtless, and he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

He united with the church of Christ in Yale College at the age of twenty two, when he was tutor, and for nearly half a century has adorned the doctrine he then professed. As to his religious principles, they were those of our Pilgrim Fathers, in which he had been educated. He loved and revered the Puritan doctrine and the Puritan character. Nor did he adopt his principles merely from traditional authority or hereditary attachment. His great mind could receive nothing for truth, without inquiry and evidence. So thorough had this investigation been on his part, that there were few abler theologians than he, even among the clergy. Hence he was intelligent, earnest and steadfast in his religious opinions. Without bigotry, with the most catholic spirit, with hearty love for all of every name who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, he was himself a Congregationalist and a Calvinist of the school of Edwards, Dwight and Scott. These views he adopted because he believed them to be taught in the Scriptures, and to accord with his

own religious experience. He felt that by the grace of God he was what he was. He was a man of prayer; and he prayed with all prayer, in the closet, the family, and the Christian assembly. He had great confidence in its efficacy, and believed the promises made to it.

He was clothed with humility, that most fundamental of Christian virtues. Indeed his modest, unassuming, unobtrusive spirit and manner, impressed all who became acquainted with him; it made his greatness still greater, and lent to it its peculiar charm, its crowning glory.

He maintained the strictest integrity and uprightness in all his public, private and professional transactions. He scrupulously adhered to truth, fulfilled his promises, abstained from any which he could not fulfill, would not sell his conscience for office or emolument, and discouraged what seemed to him to be groundless litigation.

He was remarkably kind and benevolent in his disposition, and free from the malevolent passions. He was mild, courteous, and benignant in his deportment, compassionate and tender towards the unfortunate and distressed, condescending and affable to all—not appalling even the humblest. He lent a charm and a dignity to the society in which he moved—of which he was always fond—which he illuminated and enlivened by his capacious mind and his high conversational powers. Nor will it be deemed an improper invasion of the sacredness of domestic grief, if I say, that he was a model of parental and conjugal love, tenderness and fidelity.

Mr. Sherman always cherished the strongest interest in promoting the cause of pure religion and sound morals. He gave to it the benefit of his extended influence, his persuasive powers, his liberal contributions. The cause of evangelical missions received his ardent and constant

support. He plead with great frequency and eloquence in behalf of home missions, being persuaded that the welfare of our country and the permanency of its government, depend more on Christianizing the people than on the devices of statesmen. He was among the earliest and most powerful advocates of the temperance cause. He was deeply interested in the welfare of the colored people of this land, and their relations to the well-being of this country and of Africa. He believed the Colonization Society to be the best medium of blessing the African race in this country and their own. He was grieved that it received so feeble a support from the Christian community. He had of late deeply interested himself in the cause. He had called the attention of clergymen to it, as he had opportunity. He was exceedingly anxious to attend the recent meeting of Consociation in Southport, for the purpose of laying the subject before the ministers and delegates. He had prepared himself to start; but found himself so ill that he was obliged to desist. From that time he sunk rapidly, and before the lapse of a fortnight, was released from all further earthly toils and responsibilities.

As an upholder of good public objects, a counsellor and adviser in private and public affairs, Mr. Sherman was much resorted to from this parish, town and vicinity, and indeed from a still greater distance, and from wider spheres. In this respect his loss will be, to human view, irreparable. But in his own church and society, it will be most directly and intensely felt. They were dear to him as the apple of his eye, for he preferred Jerusalem above his chief joy. He was ardently devoted to its peace, welfare, and enlargement. While he gave it a large pecuniary support; yet this was not the most im-

portant of the services he rendered to it. He was an invaluable counsellor. By the amenity of his temper, the suavity of his manners, and his persuasive eloquence, he gave a strong support to all important measures, and did much to preserve peace and unity. He delighted to attend and sustain all our social meetings. And when the aid of the brethren was needed, he was a powerful helper. In expounding the Scriptures and giving the word of exhortation, he was mighty. And how shall the void be filled? Of late he often expressed his grief to me, that his feebleness disabled him from attending our evening meetings. May his mantle fall upon his surviving brethren! If beyond the sanctuary of domestic grief, one place more than another feels an aching void, it is the sanctuary of God! If any beyond his own desolated fireside have cause of weeping and lamentation, I more! He was peculiarly fond of the society of ministers, and far and wide enjoyed their confidence and esteem. His influence and opinions were highly valued by them. To his own pastors he was ever a stay and helper, doing his utmost to promote their usefulness and salutary influence, as my brethren who have preceded me will bear me witness. And in these things, with which a stranger intermeddleth not, they alone can fully appreciate my meaning.

For the bereaved and estimable lady, who is now suddenly left solitary after having been so long cheered by his presence, and the helper of his joy, this occasion has the deepest, tenderest interest. It is our hope and prayer, that in this sorrowful crisis she will be supported by that gospel which she has so long received, and which was the sufficient stay of her departed husband in the still more trying hour of death; and that she will be enabled so to improve this melancholy dispensation, that it shall

work out for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; and that when her summons also shall come, she may go to her rest as a shock of corn ready in its season. Great, peculiar mercies are mixed in this cup of affliction. Indeed, all that in the character of her bereaved husband which renders his loss peculiarly great, is of God's peculiar mercy.

Let me exhort this church and society, together with his public associates, professional brethren, and personal friends, particularly, and all this great assembly generally, to lay this dispensation to heart. It is a great, a solemn, a mournful event. How are the mighty fallen! The fathers, where are they? One of our strong pillars is shattered and torn from underneath the temple. He must be scarcely a man who is not softened and humbled by it. As human helps fail, let us go to the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength. Although men die, he ever liveth; and because he lives, his church shall live also, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Let us then be moved to especial and extraordinary prayer, that God would supply what he has taken from us. "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men." It is exhibited as a sign of a degenerate and sinking race, to be unaffected by the deaths of God's servants. The prophet sounds the alarm, because the righteous perisheth and no man layeth it to heart. Let then those that survive, ponder these things, and be subdued and chastened. Let them consider, that to them are now passed the burdens and responsibilities hitherto borne by God's servants, whom he has taken to their eternal rest. Let them manfully, and in dependence upon God, meet the crisis, and discharge the high trust he has confided to them. Let them put their two talents

to use, and he shall give them other two. Let them come up to the help of the Lord, the help of the Lord against the mighty. And the set time to favor Zion will come, because his servants take pleasure in the stones and favor the dust thereof.

Let me speak a word to those who are without that faith, and rejecters of that Savior, which were the support and solace of our venerated and deceased brother, in his dying hour. With all his vast endowments and resources, his possession of all worldly good to which human ambition aspires, he counted all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He deemed man in his best estate to be altogether vanity. If he then dared trust no other foundation but Christ crucified, received by faith, and honored by a holy life, **HOW SHALL YE ESCAPE, IF YE NEGLECT SO GREAT A SALVATION!**

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